

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

Investigations

June 2000

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FIRE AND ARSON INVESTIGATION

INITIATING INVESTIGATIONS:

A Fire Captain **will** request from alarm to notify the Salt River Fire Marshal when any of the following circumstances exist:

1. Grass and/or field fires that cause large dollar loss, minimum (\$8,000) to buildings, residences, automobiles, fences and with reliable investigative leads and witnesses.
2. Vehicle fires, with fire damage a minimum \$8,000 loss, that are suspicious or arson related with investigative leads.
3. Fires or explosions involving level one injuries or fatalities.
4. When an arrest has been made by a police officer and/or a suspect has been taken into custody in connection with a fire.
5. Structure fires involving large dollar loss - minimum (\$20,000) or when cause and origin cannot be determined. Any incendiary or suspicious fires over \$8,000.00 that have reliable investigative leads.
6. Fires that may bring adverse public comment or have the possibility of legal action.
7. Any condition or situation in which the Incident Commander deems an immediate investigation is justified.

COOPERATION

During a fire investigation, Fire Investigators and Fire Department Officers **will** cooperate fully to insure a satisfactory conclusion of the investigation.

CIRCUMSTANCES NOT REQUIRING A FIRE INVESTIGATOR TO RESPOND

Command does not require a Fire Investigator when any of the following sets of circumstances exist:

1. When fires are set by person/s unknown in alleys, grass, fields, fences and trash, with minor damage. Also, where no information, witnesses or investigative leads indicating who is responsible for the incident.
2. Where there is evidence that the fire was caused by careless, for example; disposal of smoking materials in a sofa, mattress, bedding or in an automobile resulting in minor fire damage. Kitchen fires due to careless cooking or left unattended.
3. When juveniles admit to playing with matches or lighters and setting fires in closets, bedrooms, and/or any other areas of interior/exterior of property, causing minor fire damage. Whether or not juveniles admit to playing with matches or lighters, Command will secure all necessary information and forward it to the On-Call Fire Investigator for follow-up. Command can handle the majority of these types of incidents. If required, Command can contact the on-call Fire Investigator by telephone and relate all necessary information as soon as he/she returns to the Fire Station.

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4. Structural fires with minor fire damage:

FOLLOW-UP MEMO OR TELEPHONE GUIDELINES

If the Fire Investigator is contacted by telephone or by E-mail, please furnish the following information:

- A. Complete names of owners and/or occupants and their dates of births.
- B. Home addresses and telephone numbers.
- C. Business addresses and telephone numbers.
- D. Type of fire involved.
- E. Person(s) involved.
- F. Property description and value.
- G. Investigative leads (names, addresses and phone numbers).
- H. Witnesses (names, addresses and phone numbers).

PRESERVING EVIDENCE:

Fire Suppression personnel ***should*** exercise care in preserving evidence. Overhauling ***should be*** held to a minimum (consistent with extinguishment of the fire) when an immediate investigation has been initiated. When an immediate investigation has not been initiated, all evidence found at the scene of an incendiary fire should be retained.

1. Evidence found by suppression personnel ***should*** be left in place, and reported to Command or the fire investigator.
2. Evidence should not be collected by suppression personnel unless a delay in collecting the evidence will cause the evidence to be destroyed.
3. Photograph the evidence prior to removal from its location.
4. Packaging, labeling, and transporting of evidence is the responsibility of the fire investigator or the Police Department.
5. Do not discard any evidence.
6. Include with evidence a fire report describing the items and their location. Include a sketch.

INTERVIEWING BURN VICTIMS:

The purpose of interviewing a burn victim is to obtain information from the victim which may prove useful in determining fire cause and origin.

The interview is the responsibility of the Fire Department Investigator, who ***should*** discretely conduct interviews as follows:

1. Interviews shall be brief and to the point covering facts and circumstances directly related to the fire.
2. Interviews shall not interfere with necessary treatment and transportation of the victim.

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3. Avoid duplicating interviews already performed by others. Information obtained in interviews with burn victims **will** be reduced to written statements and will become a part of official Fire Department investigative records. Additional information regarding the victim and/or fire scene, which is obtained by the Fire Investigator during the interview, **should** be shared with the Fire Department Commanding Officer in charge of the incident for further dissemination.

CONTINUITY OF EVIDENCE:

The scene of a suspicious or incendiary fire shall not be left unattended before the Fire Investigator arrives. At least one Fire Suppression person shall remain on the scene with instructions to prevent the disturbance of fire and building conditions, deny entrance to unauthorized persons and maintain chain of custody. The person receiving this assignment shall refrain from discussion of the fire except with Fire Investigators or other assigned Fire or Police Department personnel.

INVESTIGATIVE METHODS:

OBJECTIVE:

A team concept in fire investigation will be used that will best utilize the expertise of both the Fire and Police Departments in their areas of authority and responsibility.

DETERMINATION OF ORIGIN AND CAUSE AND CIRCUMSTANCES:

The Fire Department **should** immediately notify the Fire Investigator when any of the following is encountered: arson, reckless burning, child abuse, child neglect, illegal drugs or any other crime suspected.

THE FIRE SCENE:

Whenever the Fire Investigator arrives at the scene, Fire Command **will** provide a full account of the situation and a walk through, if feasible. Lend reasonable assistance requested. The Police Department **will** lend reasonable assistance to the Fire Department.

INVESTIGATION:

Once a corpus has been established, the investigation and suspect development shall be conducted by Fire Investigations. The Police Department shall have the responsibility for security at the scene and any provide assistance necessary for a successful investigation of the crime.

EVIDENCE:

Whenever evidence is threatened at a fire scene, the Fire Department shall preserve such evidence if possible. Evidence so preserved shall be stored Fire Investigator who originally

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seized such evidence to maintain chain of custody of such evidence. The collection, preservation and identification of evidence shall be in accordance with Police procedures.

NEWS AND PRESS:

Until a corpus has been established, news and press releases regarding fire investigations will be addressed by the Fire Department P.I.O. Thereafter, all news and press releases regarding the arson investigation shall be done in conjunction with the Fire Prevention Section.

REPORTS:

Fire Investigations will:

1. Determine fire origin, cause and circumstances.
2. Sketch the fire scene.
3. Photograph the fire scene.
4. Interview witnesses and development of suspects.
5. Construct scale models and other visual aids for courtroom presentations.
6. Testify to findings and conclusions in court.

Upon completion of an arson investigation, the Fire Department will provide the Police Department with one full copy of the total findings including color photographs, sketches, narrative interviews, statements, etc., no later than forty-eight (48) hours after an arrest has been made.